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PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICIALS ADDRESS CONCERNS WITH BUREAU OFFICIALS

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo public safety officials were on hand to meet with federal officials Sunday afternoon.

"We applaud the Bureau of Justice Assistance's efforts to help the Navajo Nation better our detention facilities," said Navajo President Ben Shelly.

BJA Assistant Director Denise O'Donnell was in Window Rock for a site visit Sunday afternoon to meet with Navajo officials about the status of Navajo detention facilities.

Division of Public Safety Director John Billison was on hand to meet with O'Donnell, along with Department of Corrections Director Delores Greyeyes.

"I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to have a round table discussion about Navajo Nation criminal justice issues," Billison said during a welcome address.

Billison said he was thankful for the money the Navajo Nation received from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which included \$225 million for tribal jail construction and another \$74 million from other federal sources. BJA helped secure the funding for the Navajo Nation.

"Thank you for this type of funding level, the federal government has given hope to Navajo families because we can incarcerate more criminal offenders," Billison said. "Those families were put at risk due to our inability to incarcerate violent offenders because of our overcrowded and insufficient jails."

Greyeyes followed that point and talked about the conditions of the jails on the Navajo Nation.

She cited a 2006 Shubnum Strategic Management Applications report, which stated the detention facility in Window Rock has two detention officers for 68 inmates.

She noted that federal agencies need to have better communication with each other.

"To help better our situation, we need the U.S. Department of Justice and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to work together and need to communicate more effectively to better serve the Navajo Nation and other tribal nations," she said.

Billison said that Sunday's meeting was to establish better communication between the Navajo Nation and federal agencies.

"The Navajo Department of Public Safety is taking progressive steps in a positive direction to shape our own future," Billison said.